Women — Jap.

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The Women of Japan

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You know how we hold street meetings in Japan? We rent a house—a corner house, if possible—on a busy street, take out the sliding doors that serve as wall, and with the floor of the room for your plalform—you soon have an audience around you. Some time ago I had the privilege of sitti: on such a platform from which two of the missionary gentlemen preached. The next day a hairdresser told one of her patrons that she had attended a meeting the night before and had seen three foreigners,—two of whom wore Japanese clothes,—one of whom was dressed in the garments of the West. This patron,—a Christian,—who knew us very well, questioned the hairdresser closely. It is not the custom of foreigners in Japan to wear Japanese clothes, and our friend wanted to know how two of us happened to do so. The bright boy of the household finally asked, "Did the two wear the officers dress?" *i. e.*, coat and trousers; and "Yes" was the answer. The dress of the Japanese school-teacher, officer, soldier, pro-

fessional man, so prevailingly the Western garments that this working woman in a country village called it "Japanese dress." My feminine garments she recognized as something different. And this is the key to the whole situation. It is hard to tell "what Christian thought has accomplished for Japan," for Christian thought has become so a part of Japanese thought that the average young Japanese will tell you "this was always so." The truth is, Japan has been as truly "set apart," as truly a chosen nation, as was Israel of old. Why should Japan have taken such hold in so few years of all the best thought of Christian civilization had she not been specially ready to receive it?

Who was it that said "Japanese do not need religion, for the impulses of their hearts are pure?" While there is much that grates in this assertion, there is the grain of truth that restatement makes. "The Japanese are peculiarly fitted for Christianity, for they have open hearts and seize and assimilate the best."

In all lands the "Woman question" is a delicate one, and I hesitate to discuss the question. Each year that I am in Japan I grow to love and admire Japanese womankind; and when to all the virtues of the Samurai woman you add the blessing of Christian experience, it seems to me you

reach about the best development that this mundane sphere has yet realized. How Christian women of the West can let any chance pass for work that brings such reward as this work in Japan, passes my comprehension!

Comparisons are always odious, so I will not try to tell you what Japanese women were; but I will give you a quotation from the [illegible], a Japanese newspaper, that you may hear what a Japa[illegible] of them:—

"Japanese women prefer to shine at home rather than abroad, and it is we men who should be grateful for this self-abnegation of choice. A good wife in this country of ours means more than anywhere else the world over. Her first thought is for the pleasure, ease, and personal gratification of her husband. To secure his welfare she deems no sacrifice on her part too great, no demand on her time or patience too large.

"Pre-eminent among the qualities of the women of this our native land is that of submissiveness and docility. Young and inexperienced females are essentially malleable, and may be moulded into almost any form. Given an honest, true-hearted preceptor, and they will eventually become women of rare qualities of heart and mind; given a bad conductor or early

trained to gaze upon any form of vice with leniency, and the result will be as deplorable as it is inevitable. There is no inherent depravity, no excessive amorousness, no inborn viciousness. Yet nearly every one of these lamentable characteristics can be developed by environment and evil training; for in Japan, as in all other lands, as the tree is bent so it will grow. Man being acknowledgedly, in accordance with the canons of our ancestors, the better and worthier animal, it would seem both unnatural to our women and strange to us to pay them that excessive and often strained respect characteristic of Western social circles.

"As for diligence and promptitude in the performance of duties, there is, we hold, little to be said. Our women are proverbially neat and cleanly in their ways and habits, and they seem to take pride in keeping all about them in accordance with these laudable tastes. In the drudgery of household duties they are deft, nimble, and quick. As sempstresses they often excel, while the majority possess no small degree of culinary skill. In the politer arts, the arranging of flowers (*ike-bana*), music, painting, and frequently in dancing according to Japanese style, they are skillful, sometimes adept. Less well may we speak of their education, though in this direction great progress has been made in the last decade or so. It is no longer

thought sufficient if a young girl can write poems in [illegible]ant *hiragana*, or read, without too many blunders, any of the ne[illegible]ers of the day. Young women of the middle and higher classes are required to have some knowledge of foreign tongues. English in particular they must play the organ or piano; they must have more than a mere acquaintance with the foreign style etiquette now becoming so fashionable. They are more thoroughly instructed in history, geography, and the keeping of accounts; their physique is more intelligently taken care of, and they are encouraged to indulge in gymnastic exercises. All this has by no means unsexed our women, but has served to give them if anything an additional charm, while better training them to serve as intellectually fitted wives and mothers. Their horizon has broadened, in a word, and the old-style semi-zenana kind of seclusion is becoming obsolete and confessedly behind the times. Still our women preserve withal their remarkably docile and attractive qualities. And with this has come a decline in the fortunes of the *geisha* sisterhood. Our women becoming more companionable and better than ever able to please, we husbands no longer crave for the dubious exhilaration of the society of mercenary Aspasias. We are here, of course, speaking in general terms; there are still thousands for those for whom the sprightly

geisha, venal t[illegible]gh she be, has charms—to the detriment of their lawful spouses. Yet [illegible]s undeniable that this sort of society is becoming steadily less pop[illegible]; and, all things considered, it is well that it should so be. Nor is the [illegible]erage *geisha* of to-day at all comparable with her predecessors of half [illegible] century ago. There is unquestionably greater laxity of morals, less re[illegible]ement, less actual skill in the arts of pleasing, more open sensuality. Hence men of upright character and stricter views are not fon[illegible] of being seen or recognized in such surroundings.

"On the whole, therefore, we take it that the women of Japan are essentially lovable and laudable. And we feel that our countrymen will echo the opinions we have, if imperfectly, expressed. As mothers, wives, or sisters, we would not change them with the fairest and best of the West; nor would we have them anything but just what and as they are."

Here are the words of a Japanese woman:—

"During my stay in America, the one thing which struck me particularly and filled me with admiration is the position American women hold, the great influence that they exercise for good, the power given them by education and training, the congenial intercourse between men and women, and the sympathy existing in the homes between brothers and sisters, husbands

and wives. There has seemed to me no reason why this should not be so in my own country, for in Japan there has never been any great prejudice against women such as we find in many countries of the East, but the customs of the Middle Ages, the introduction of the doctrine of Confucius, and the religion of Buddha have all had their blighting influence, and the present women of Japan are far below the men in theory and in actual practice.

"Japan has made phenomenal progress in late years. Universities, colleges, and schools have sprung up, and all that Europe and America had to offer in learning and science has been eagerly seized and introduced. But with much advance for the nation and progress for the men, no corresponding advantages have been given to the women, and little has been done for their education, for helping them to meet the new conditions of life that the present time has brought. To-day the men are out in the busy life of new Japan, the women are shut up at home, and the gap is getting wider than even in the past years when the men were less advanced.

"I have felt that never until Japanese women were elevated and educated could Japan take a high stand, and I had hoped that at this time of great change, women might take their right place in the home and in society. The times are critical, and a grand work lies before those who would help

to elevate the wom[illegible] As it is at present the wives are not fit to be companions of educa[illegible]en, for they cannot win the respect of their husbands, nor give them the sympathy which only can make the home a happy one. Two great things are lacking, Christianity and education.

"The cry[illegible]l at present is for women teachers of the higher education; for Japanese women fitted to enter at once into the government and private schools to educate the young girls into higher lines of thought, and to teach them by example and precept the benefits of a Christian civilization."

A thoughtful reading of the above must prove that much can yet be done for Japan through its women, and its women educated in your mission schools have done and are doing great things for the land. Proofs? I was more than gratified to hear Miss Reynolds, of the Y. W. C. A., who has just returned from a tour of the world, tell that beautiful circle of young women at Northfield—young women who are the flower of our homes and colleges—of the promise she had seen in the young women of our schools in Japan. My testimony you may discount, but she comes to you from the outside.

Each missionary from any one of the sixty girls' schools in Japan could tell you of the wonderful things she has seen in the school among the girls